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**Contemporary White Opposition to Black Political Action:  
The Case of Black Lives Matter**

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**Contemporary White Opposition to Black Political Action:  
The Case of Black Lives Matter**

**by**

**Karen Hanhee Lee**

**Thesis**

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## **Dedication**

Dedicated to my loving parents. My heroes.

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My deepest gratitude to Dr. Becky Pettit and Dr. Mary Rose for all the wonderful lessons.

## **Abstract**

### **Contemporary White Opposition to Black Political Action: The Case of Black Lives Matter**

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Abstract: Scholars have long debated the significance of race in shaping the sociopolitical attitudes of White-Americans in the arena of race-based policies. But few studies have addressed this debate in the context of contemporary black political action. Using nationally representative data from the 2016 American National Election Studies Survey, I investigate the association between racial attitudes and White orientation towards Black Lives Matter, while controlling for prominent race-neutral explanations. Contrary to claims that modern opposition is fueled by ostensibly race-neutral factors such as general orientation towards protest and police, conservative ideology, or a moral equalitarian concern for all lives, I find that racial attitudes are the dominant predictors of contemporary White opposition to the movement. Furthermore, though scholars have argued that colorblind racism is the dominant racial schema of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, my results indicate that overt racism and nationalism are also highly significant schemas driving White opposition towards Black Lives Matter. Together these insights bring White opposition towards Black Lives Matter into sharper focus and serves as a window into race relations in the contemporary context.

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## INTRODUCTION

White-Americans report strong support for the principles of racial equality and integration, but are far less likely to support policies designed to ameliorate existing racial disparities (Schuman et. al 1998; Krysan 2000; Tuch and Hughes 2011). This has generated substantial debate over whether and to what extent racial attitude<sup>1</sup> shape White sociopolitical orientations in the contemporary United States. Much of this debate has occurred in the arena of race-based policies, where it remains unresolved whether opposition is fundamentally a matter of political ideology or racial animus. I argue that an even clearer approach to this debate is through examining White attitudes towards *direct* Black political claims expressed through collective action. However, there is limited systemic evidence on White orientations towards Black political action *in the contemporary context*.

Since 2013, the Black Lives Matter movement is arguably the most significant and sustained wave of Black political action since the Civil Rights movement. Descriptive analyses of public opinion towards the movement show divisions along racial and political lines (Pew Research Center 2016). Thus, though we know who is demographically more or less likely to support the movement, there is limited evidence on the factors that are shaping these divisions. This study has two objectives. The first objective is to examine the role of racial attitudes in shaping orientation towards Black Lives Matter while accounting for prominent race-neutral alternative explanations. Second, to better understand the within-group variation, the next objective is to examine the predictive power of key sociodemographic characteristics on the four racial schemas tested in this study specifically colorblind racism, overt racism, perceived group threat, and nationalism.

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<sup>1</sup> I define *racial attitudes* as “favorable or unfavorable evaluation of racial and ethnic groups” (Schumann 1998). I use racial attitudes to refer to the general racial attitudes under investigation. I use *racial schemas* to refer to the four race-related “attitudinal frameworks,” which are groups of racial attitudes that hang together under a common theme.

In racialized social systems where power and resource are systematically distributed along racial lines, ethnoracial movements are crucial sites for contestation over racial politics (Bonilla-Silva 2015). Furthermore, detecting the factors that shape public opinion is critical to understanding interactions between dominant publics and ethnoracial movements, which can ultimately affect the political outcomes of the movement (Thomas and Louis 2014). Therefore, the objective of this article is to bring contemporary White opposition towards Black political action into sharper focus.

It offers the following insights. (1) Racial attitudes are the dominant predictors of opposition towards the Black Lives Matter movement net of major ostensibly race-neutral explanations (2) Contrary to a prevalent truism in the race literature that colorblind racism has largely replaced overt racism in the contemporary era, my results show that overt racism is a highly significant and independent predictor of opposition towards the movement. (3) Additionally, income, education, and political party are highly consistent predictors of all four racial schemas tested namely overt racism, colorblind racism, perceived group threat, and nationalism. However, White men are more likely to report overt racism whereas White women are more likely to report perceived group threat and nationalism. Together these insights engage the broader theoretical debate over what factors shape White opposition towards government as well as popular efforts to challenge existing racial disparities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars have advanced a number of explanations for why White-Americans are supportive of racial equality in principle and significantly less supportive of government interventions intended to improve racial disparities. The theories can be divided into two key theoretical camps: theories that deemphasize the role of race and theories that centralize the significance of race in shaping the sociopolitical views and behaviors of White-Americans. Although most of these theoretical frameworks have been employed to understand attitudes towards race-based policies, they are also useful in motivating potential explanations for opposition towards Black political action. In this section, I review the major theoretical arguments concerning this debate. I refer to the theoretical camps as “race-neutral” and “race-centric.” Even proponents that deemphasize the significance of race rarely negate its influence completely. But the distinction is valuable because a central line of division between the camps is whether racial attitudes exert a dominant effect over sociopolitical views and behaviors of White-Americans in the contemporary United States.

### RACE-NEUTRAL EXPLANATIONS

There are four prominent “race-neutral” explanations that have been advanced to explain white opposition to government interventions designed to address racial disparities. In this study, I examine the explanatory power of these explanations in white opposition towards *a popular* intervention challenging racial disparities through collective action. Arguably the most prominent explanation is the principled conservative perspective. According to principled conservatism, while racial animus drove White sociopolitical attitudes in the past, contemporary opposition towards Black political action is likely based in race-neutral conservative ideologies (Sniderman, Crosby, & Howell, 2000; Sniderman & Piazza, 1993; Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986a). This perspective claims that people oppose race-based policies because American values of equity and individualism are at odds with policies that allocate opportunity on the basis of

race irrelevant to personal merit (Kuklinski et al., 1997). Therefore, policies that include ethnoracial recognition and redistribution are considered problematic. Principled conservatism theorists claim that these political ideologies are distinct from racial animus through evidence that once conservatism and individualistic values are controlled, measures of racial attitudes only weakly predict opposition to race-based policies (Sniderman, Brody, & Kuklinski, 1984).

Within the race-neutral camp, it has also been argued that general orientation towards protest as a political strategy may shape opposition towards Black political action, but that this disapproval extends to all forms of disruptive collective action. For example, social movement scholars find evidence for a general public sensitivity to protest characteristics such as size of protest and level of civil disobedience particularly disruptive and violent tactics (Fair and Shepherd 2006; Zaal, Laar, Ståhl, Ellemers, and Derks 2011). In a similar vein, research also suggests that a general orientation towards law enforcement may also shape attitudes towards movements. Protests must indirectly or directly in contact with law enforcement whose institutional role is to maintain public order (Della Porta and Fillieule 2007). Therefore, those that are more supportive of police and their institutional role in maintaining public order against public disruptions may also be less likely to support protests.

But there are further reasons why a positive orientation towards the police may be particularly associated with negative attitudes towards the Black Lives Matter movement. Black Lives Matter protests has been largely centered around the issue of police brutality (Camp and Heatherton 2016). For example, the counter-mobilization Blue Lives Matter discursively organizes their opposition to Black Lives Matter around a concern for law enforcement. Furthermore, scholars of legal cynicism have shown that White-Americans generally have higher levels of trust in institutions such as law enforcement (Kirk and Papacristos 2011). Therefore, although these orientations are not explicitly based in race, the aforementioned reasons lead me to expect that these orientations are at least partially correlated with racial attitudes (Bobo 1988).

Another argument is the moral equalitarianism perspective. This perspective is that an equalitarian belief in all lives fuels opposition towards a movement that centralizes the lives of one racial group. The claim is that an ethnoracial movement privileging the lives of one racial group over the lives of other Americans is at odds with beliefs about equality among citizens. According to this perspective, we should then expect that individuals who hold stronger beliefs in equality to oppose the Black Lives Matter movement.

### **RACE CENTRIC EXPLANATIONS**

On the other side of this debate are theorists that emphasize the persisting relevance of racism in shaping White sociopolitical views and actions (Bobo, Kluegel, & Smith, 1997; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Federico & Sidanius, 2002). There are four prevalent race-centric explanations that I review in this section. Within the race literature, there is prevalent truism that the overt racism that pervaded the pre-Civil Rights context has declined and been largely replaced by colorblind racism (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997; Bonilla-Silva 1997; Bonilla-Silva 2004). Colorblind racism is anchored in the belief that race no longer “matters” in the United States. Under this logic, racial disparities are justified by ideologies about the “cultural deficiencies” of racial minorities, the “naturalness of racial phenomena,” the “minimized or obsolete” significance of racial discrimination, and abstract liberal ideas of individualism, equal opportunity, and personal choice (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Hughey, Embrick, and Doane 2015; Omi and Winant 2015). Therefore, according to this perspective, opposition towards Black political action in the contemporary era is predominantly related to subscription to varying colorblind racial ideologies.

In contrast to colorblind racism, overt racism make up what scholars theorize as “traditional racism.” This expression of racism are based in overtly racist beliefs in the biological inferiority of Black, anti-Black affect and negative stereotypes (Brown et. al 2009). Though scholars have documented a decline in overt racism in national survey data (Schuman et. al 1998), there has also been evidence that overt racism is still

pervasive (Picca and Feagin 2007; Knuckley and Kim 2015). Still different scholars claim that while expressions of overt racism may have declined since the pre-Civil Rights era, but we are now seeing “a return to old-fashioned racism” evidenced by the overtly racist beliefs predicting partisan attitudes during Obama’s presidency (Tesler 2016).

Beyond colorblind and overt racism, Blumer advanced a theoretical perspective that claims racial animus stems from perceived collective threat (Blumer 1958). According to this theory, group are hierarchally ordered in relation to one another and thus perceived threats to “a sense of group position,” is the root of racial prejudice (Blumer 1958). Group threat theorists propose that perceived threat can be both realistic threats to material resources and symbolic threats to status and group position (Bobo et al 1997; Stephen et. al 2002). For example, Quillian found that the average degree of reported prejudice in 12 European countries is strongly related to the threat perceived by the dominant group residents there (Quillian 1995). Furthermore, studies show that many White-Americans consider anti-White discrimination to be a bigger societal problem than anti-Black discrimination (Norton and Sommers 2011). Thus, perceived discrimination is likely an increasingly important form of perceived threat among White-Americans. According to this perspective, respondents that report higher levels of perceived group threat are less likely to support the Black Lives Matter movement.

Finally, nationalism and racism are particularly difficult concepts to disentangle. However, as nations are socially constructed “imagined communities” (Anderson 1983), nationalism depends on individuals conceptualizing who is part of their imagined community and who is not (Theiss-Morse 2009). That is why nationalism and racism have been historically intertwined throughout history (Balibar and Wallerstein 2011). In the contemporary United States context, a study two classes of American popular nationalism were significantly associated with negative attitudes towards racial minorities and immigrants (Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016). This research suggests that nation-based racial logics may also play a role in White attitudes towards Black political action in the United States.

In this section, I've reviewed the dominant theoretical perspective in the race-neutral camp and race-centric camp that have been advanced to explain White sociopolitical attitudes towards racial issues. This study tests these competing theories in the context of orientation towards contemporary black political action. If theories of principled conservatism, general orientation towards protest and police, or moral equalitarianism are dominant predictors of attitudes towards the Black Lives Matter movement, then this suggests that contemporary opposition is largely related to ideological clashes over appropriate politics. In contrast, if race-centric theories are the strongest predictors of orientation towards the movement, then this implies that White sociopolitical views are still significantly shaped by their racial attitudes.

#### **SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC VARIATION**

In this study, I test four racial schemas: colorblind racism, overt racism, perceived group threat, and nationalism. Existing research suggests that there is sociodemographic variation in reported subscription to the various racial schemas. Scholars have found that colorblind racism is adopted broadly across the White population as well as across minority populations (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997; Carr 1997; Bonilla-Silva 2001; Dovidio and Gaertner 2004). However, studies indicate that there is more sociodemographic variation in individuals that report overt racial attitudes and perceived group threat. Scholars have found that conservatism and residence in the Southern region of the United States are significant predictors of more overt racial beliefs and perceptions of threat (Krysan 2000). Furthermore, a recent study found that Southern Whites particularly evangelical Protestants and Republicans were over-represented among Whites who report racial discrimination (Maryl and Saperstein 2013). They also found that lower education levels, recent unemployment, and younger ages were also associated with elevated rates of reported racial discrimination among Whites. Additionally, Bonikowski and DiMaggio (2016) found that White-Americans categorized as ardent nationalists and restrictive nationalists had particularly unfavorable attitudes towards immigrants and ethnic minorities. Republican, older, and less well-educated

were overrepresented in the ardent nationalist category. In contrast, restrictive nationalists were more likely to be individuals without a college degree, lower-income, evangelical Protestants, and women. According to this research, we can expect political party, religion, education, income, age, and gender to co-vary with subscription to the different racial schemas within the race-centric theoretical camp.

## **BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT**

Catalyzed by the murder of Trayvon Martin and subsequent acquittal of George Zimmerman, the Black Lives Matter began in 2013 as a tweet by co-founder, Alicia Garza that affirmed Black lives. This was later transformed into the hashtag #Blacklivesmatter by co-founder Patrisse Cullors. Garza and Cullors along with third co-founder Opal Tometi went on to build a movement around this mantra. The movement expanded to be a member-led global network of more than 40 chapters and is now part of an umbrella movement consisting of more than 50 organizations, the Movement for Black Lives. The movement is defined as an “ideological and political intervention in a world where Black Lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. ...and an affirmation of Black folks’ humanity, our contributions to this society, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.” (Black Lives Matter).

It is a legitimate case study of Black political action because of its visibility and significance, which Gamson (1976) argues are fundamental measures of movement success. In a 2016 article, media scholars found evidence that Black Lives Matter twitter activity actually predicts mainstream news coverage of police brutality, which in turn is the strongest driver of attention to the issue from political elites (Freelon et. al 2016). Furthermore, since Twitter’s inception in 2006, #BlackLivesMatter has been among the most used hashtags referring to a social cause (Lowery 2017). Additionally, Black Lives Matter movement leaders held meetings with both democratic presidential nominees in 2015; a significant achievement by social movement standards (Freelon et. al 2016). The burgeoning evidence suggests that the Black Lives Matter movement is the most consequential wave of Black political action since the Civil Rights era (Leach and Allen



2017). Its significance makes examining attitudes towards the movement comparable to taking America's racial pulse in the contemporary context, and yet few studies have taken up this empirical endeavor.

## **METHODS**

### **RESEARCH PLAN**

My goal is to assess the degree to which theories of the race-centric camp and race-neutral camp explain attitudes towards the Black Lives Matter movement. To do so, I operationalize the core concepts of each theory from each camp. I individually test the explanatory power of the race-centric model and race-neutral model while controlling for sociodemographic factors. I then test the models together to examine the degree to which racial attitudes shape feelings towards the Black Lives Matter movement. Additionally, to better understand the within-group heterogeneity, I explore the association between key sociodemographic characteristics and the four racial schemas tested in this study specifically colorblind racism, overt racism, perceived group threat, and nationalism.

### **DATA**

Data is drawn from the 2016 American National Elections Studies (ANES) Times Series Study. ANES is a rich, nationally representative dataset that provides high-quality data on public opinion and political behavior. It is also one of the first large datasets that contain a variable on feelings towards the Black Lives Matter movement. Data was collected in the beginning of early September 2016 and continued into January 2017. Pre-election interviews were conducted with study respondents during the two months prior to the 2016 elections and were followed by post-election re-interviewing beginning November 9, 2016. The study is a complex sample design and consists of two independently drawn probability samples, an internet mode sample and a face-to-face mode sample. They both describe approximately the same population. The target population for the face-to-face mode was 222.6 million U.S. citizens age 18 or older living in the 48 contiguous states of the USA or the District of Columbia, and the target population for the Internet mode was 224.1 million U.S. citizens age 18 or older living in the 50 US states or the District of Columbia.

With the use of the sample weights provided, the survey is designed to describe a representative sample of U.S. citizens age 18 or older living in the United States on the basis of age, gender, race-ethnicity, education, region, and party identification. All the results I present are weighted to correct for unequal probability of selection and for nonresponse to the survey. The response rate, using the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) formula for the minimum response rate (known as AAPOR Response Rate 1) on the pre-election interview, was 50 percent for the face-to-face component and 44 percent for the Internet component. The re-interview rate on the post-election survey was 90 percent for the face-to-face component and 84 percent for the Internet component. Of the 4,271 respondents, 2,631 respondents (a) completed both the pre and post surveys, (b) and self-identified as non-Hispanic White.

Because the American National Elections Studies data was collected using a complex sampling design, I estimate variance using a Taylor series estimation that computes variances within each stratum and pools estimates together (DeBell 2010). All my analyses also include sample weights that correct for unequal probability of selection and for nonresponse to the survey. Finally, I produce design-consistent estimates in all my analyses by using the Taylor Series method (DeBell 2010).

**Dependent Variable:** The dependent variable measures feelings towards Black Lives Matter through a feeling thermometer ranging from 0-100. According to the ANES, respondents were given a visual sketch of a thermometer for reference, which placed 100 as a “very warm or favorable feeling,” 50 representing “no feeling at all” and 0 for “very cold or unfavorable feeling,” with appropriate brackets in between. This variable was kept as a continuous variable for the analysis with higher numbers indicating more positive feelings towards Black Lives Matter.

**Independent Variables:** To facilitate interpretation, all independent variables were scaled to 0-1 with 1 being the highest possible value for the measure and 0 being the lowest possible value for that measure. A chart detailing measure construction and alpha coefficients of all variables is included in the appendix.

*Principled conservatism:* I constructed two scales to measure conservative ideology. My first scale, social conservatism was constructed using four survey items on marriage, traditional values, abortion, and religiosity. The alpha coefficient for social conservatism was 0.74. The second scale, fiscal conservatism was constructed using four survey items on limited government, business, tax, and welfare. The alpha coefficient for fiscal conservatism was 0.70. Both measures were coded so that higher values indicated higher levels of conservatism. The correlation between fiscal and social conservatism was 0.40.<sup>2</sup>

*Orientation towards protest:* I constructed two scales to measure general orientation towards protest. The first question assessed respondents perception of how justified the police are in roughing up protesters. The scale ran from 5 meaning a great deal, 4 meaning a lot, 3 meaning a modest amount, 2 meaning a little, and 1 meaning not at all. The second question assessed respondent perceptions of how justified protesters are in the use of violence. The scale ran from 5 meaning a great deal, 4 meaning a lot, 3 meaning a modest amount, 2 meaning a little, and 1 meaning not at all. In all my analysis, I test these two questions as two separate independent variables. I do this because they did not load to a sufficient degree on one factor during factor analysis suggesting that the comments measure different dimensions of an orientation towards social movements. However, I keep both variables as both dimensions of this orientation are informative in their own right. Both variables were coded so that higher numbers signify more negative

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<sup>2</sup> I investigated whether fiscal and social conservatism may be tapping a single construct. A varimax factor analysis of the eight measures used to construct the two scales showed that they generate two distinct factors. The four items used to construct the scale, fiscal conservatism, loaded on the first factor (Eigenvalue 1.10) and the three items used to construct the scale, social conservatism, loaded on the second factor (Eigenvalue 1.83).

orientations towards protest. I follow the example of previous scholars and argue that these items act as a general construct of orientations towards protest and insurgent politics as a legitimate means of attaining political goals (Isaac, Mutran, and Stryker 1980).

*Orientation towards police:* My measure of general orientation towards the police is based on a feeling thermometer that assessed respondents' attitudes towards the police. These data show that the mean response on the feeling thermometer was 0.79 indicating that the respondents in my sample had relatively positive feelings towards the police.

*Moral equalitarianism:* My measure of moral equalitarianism was constructed using three survey items. All items were measured on a 5 point Likert scale with options: Agree strongly, Agree somewhat, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree somewhat, Disagree strongly. The statements were (1) This country would be better off if we worried less about how equal people are. (2) It is not really that big a problem if some people have more of a chance in life than others. (3) If people were treated more equally in this country we would have many fewer problems. The alpha coefficient for *moral equalitarianism* was 0.70. The responses were coded so that higher values indicate that individuals had stronger beliefs in equality as a principle.

*Colorblind racism:* I constructed the scale, colorblind racism that measures the degree to which respondents adhered to colorblind racial ideology. This measure was created using four survey items. All items were measured on a 5 point Likert scale with options: Agree strongly, Agree somewhat, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree somewhat, Disagree strongly. (1) Blacks should work up without special favors. (2) Past slavery makes life more difficult for Blacks. (3) Blacks have gotten less than they deserve. (4) Blacks must try harder to get ahead. The alpha coefficient for *colorblind racism* was 0.74 and responses were coded so that higher values indicate greater adherence to colorblind racial

ideology. This scale is similar to the ones constructed by previous scholars (Bobo and Kluegel, 1993; Sears and Henry, 2003).

*Overt racism:* The *overt racism* scale was constructed using three survey items measuring traditional expressions of overt racism. The first item is a feeling thermometer measuring feelings towards Black-Americans from 0-100. The second and third items were questions assessing whether individuals hold negative racial stereotypes. (1) What would you rate Blacks on a scale of 1-7? (where 1 indicates peaceful, 7 means violent, and 4 indicates that respondents rated most Blacks are not closer to either end). (2) What would you rate Blacks on a scale of 1 to 7? (where 1 indicates hardworking, 7 means lazy, and 4 means respondents rated Blacks are not close to either end). The alpha coefficient of the *overt racism* scale was 0.72 and responses were coded so that higher values indicate higher reports of overt racism.

*Perceived group threat:* The *perceived group threat* scale measures the degree to which individuals perceive out-group threat to Whites as a racial collective. This scale was constructed using the following question: (1) Perceived discrimination: “How much discrimination is there in the United States today against Whites? 1. A great deal. 2. A lot. 3. A moderate amount. 4. A little. 5. None at all. (2) Perception of economic threat : “How likely is it that many Whites are unable to find a job because employers are hiring minorities instead? 1. Extremely likely. 2. Very likely. 3. Moderately likely. 4. Slightly likely. 5. Not at all likely. (3) Perception of unfair laws against Whites: How important is it that Whites work together to change laws that are unfair to Whites? 1. Extremely important 2. Very important. 3. Moderately important. 4. A little important 5. Not at all important. The alpha coefficient of that scale is 0.64.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In a varimax factor analysis, the three measures loaded onto the first factor with an Eigenvalue of 0.92. The factor loading for perceived discrimination was 0.31, perceptions of economic threat was 0.62, and perceptions of unfair laws to rights was 0.66. Although not optimal, I choose to keep the measure because the survey items are the best available in this dataset to measure the general construct of perceived group

*Nationalism:* I constructed the nationalism scale to measure the degree to which individuals held nationalistic beliefs. The scale was constructed using three survey items. (1) National pride: “When you see the American flag flying, does it make you feel good, bad, or neither good nor bad? 1. Good 2. Bad 3. Neither good nor bad. (2) National identification: “How important is being American to one’s identity?” 1. Extremely important 2. Very important. 3. Moderately important. 4. A little important 5. Not at all important. (3) National Hubris<sup>4</sup>: ‘The world would be a better place if people from other countries were more like Americans.’ 1. Agree strongly 2. Agree somewhat 3. Neither agree nor disagree 4. Disagree somewhat 5. Disagree strongly. The alpha coefficient of this scale was 0.70 and responses were coded so that higher values indicate greater adherence to nationalistic sentiments measured by the aforementioned survey items.

*Sociodemographic variables:* **Education** is a continuous measure from 1 year of education to 16 years of education. **Gender** is a dichotomous variable with women as the omitted category. **Income** is a continuous measure of income, logged due to a positive skew. **Church attendance** is measured using the question “Do you go to religious services [every week, almost every week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, or never/ never, a few times a year, once or twice a month, almost every week, or every week]? **Political party options** is limited to Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. **Religion** is limited to non-religious, protestant, catholic, Jewish. Non-religious is the omitted category. **Age** is a continuous variable from 18-90 years old. *Table 1* presents the descriptive statistics for the variables used in the following analyses.

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threat. I also argue that they are able to capture the general construct of perceived group threat that is different from the other constructs tested.

<sup>4</sup> In line with Bonikowski and DiMaggio (2016), I use the term *national hubris* to describe form of patriotism that is extent in extent and entails not only pride in one’s own group but assertions of superiority over others.

## **ANALYTICAL STRATEGY**

I employed ordinary least squares to present my results. 12.77 % of the data is missing. I imputed missing data based on the demographic variables allowing me to analyze a complete data set with no missing cases. I then replicated the same analysis using listwise deletion. The results are substantively the same. I did not detect excessive multicollinearity. The largest variance inflation factor was 2.93. The weighted sample was analyzed.



**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics**

VARIABLES	STANDARDIZED		UNSTANDARDIZED		SCALE		OBSERVATIONS
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	
DV (Feelings towards BLM)	42.28	(30.80)	42.28	(0.80)	0	100	2597
Social Conservatism	0.46	(0.01)	0.46	(0.01)	0	1	2629
Fiscal Conservatism	0.54	(0.00)	0.54	(0.00)	0	1	2629
Justified Police Force	0.36	(0.01)	2.45	(0.04)	1	5	2599
Unjustified Protest Violence	0.95	(0.00)	4.79	(0.02)	1	5	2613
Pro-Police Affect	0.79	(0.01)	78.88	(0.55)	0	100	2620
Moral Equalitarianism	0.58	(0.01)	0.58	(0.01)	0	100	2,624
Colorblind Racism	0.61	(0.01)	0.61	(0.01)	0	1	2628
Overt Racism	0.46	(0.00)	0.46	(0.00)	0	1	2606
Perceived Group Threat	0.32	(0.00)	0.32	(0.00)	0	1	2611
Nationalism	0.80	(0.00)	0.80	(0.00)	0	1	2630
Education	10.92	(0.06)	10.92	(0.06)	1	16	2611
Income (Logged)	2.60	(0.03)	2.60	(0.03)	0	3.33	2526
Men <sup>1</sup>	48.30%	(0.01)	48.30%	(0.01)	1	0	2609
Church Attendance	2.41	(0.04)	2.41	(0.04)	1	5	2630
Democrat	29.20%	(0.02)	29.20%	(0.02)	0	1	741
Republican	36.20%	(0.01)	36.30%	(0.01)	0	1	904
Independent	34.50%	(0.01)	34.50%	(0.01)	0	1	863
Non-Religious	44.90%	(0.01)	44.90%	(0.01)	0	1	1147
Protestant	24.01%	(0.01)	24.01%	(0.01)	0	1	676
Catholic	13.52%	(0.01)	13.52%	(0.01)	0	1	368
Jewish	1.31%	(0.00)	1.31%	(0.00)	0	1	37
Age	48.72	(0.50)	48.72	(0.50)	18	90	2573

\*\*\* P<0.01, \*\* P<0.05, \* P<0.1

Note.— Weighted Values Shown.

<sup>1</sup> Women are the omitted category.

## RESULTS

In table 2, I investigate the association between racial prejudice and orientation towards the Black Lives Matter movement, while accounting for prominent race-neutral explanations. In Model 1, I test the effects of four measures from the race-centric camp on attitudes towards the movement. Results show that nationalism, colorblind racism and overt racism significantly predict negative attitudes towards Black Lives Matter although the colorblind racism and overt racism effect are particularly large. Model 2 tests the predictive power of measures from the race-neutral camp namely fiscal conservatism, social conservatism, orientation towards the police, moral equalitarianism and orientation towards protest on attitudes towards Black Lives Matter. Results indicate that the variables from the race-neutral camp all predict negative attitudes towards the Black Lives Matter movement except for moral equalitarianism, which predicts substantial support for the movement. In Model 3, I include all variables from both the race-neutral and race-centric camp. I find that once we include measures of racial attitudes, there is a significant decline in effect sizes for nearly all variables in the race-neutral camp and orientation towards police is no longer significant. Fiscal conservatism is the exception. Furthermore, colorblind racism maintains the largest effect on orientation towards Black Lives Matter and overt racism barely changes in effect size. These findings provide evidence that racial attitudes are the most dominant factors shaping White orientations towards the contemporary black movement.

In table 2, I investigate my second question: how does White subscription to the various racial schemas vary by sociodemographic factors? I find overwhelming consistency in the sociodemographic factors that predict subscription *to all racial schemas*. Specifically, Republicans and Independents are consistently more likely to subscribe to every racial schema. Conversely, higher education and income consistently predict lower subscription to every racial schema. Also, in line with existing research, religion is a prominent factor shaping White political orientations but it's effect is nuanced. I find that all religious respondents except for Jewish respondents are

significantly more likely to subscribe to all racial schemas than their non-religious counterparts. However, respondents who attend church more often are also less likely to subscribe to overt racial schemas. Finally, I find that White men are more likely than White women to report overt racial schemas, whereas White women are more likely than White men to report nation-based and perceived group threat racial schemas.

**Table 2. Regression Models predicting attitudes towards Black Lives Matter  
(n=2,631)**

VARIABLES	MODEL 1		MODEL 2		MODEL 3	
	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>SE</i>
<i>Race-centric</i>						
Colorblind Racism	-50.30***	(2.50)			<b>-36.29***</b>	(2.66)
Overt Racism	-30.88***	(3.13)			<b>-28.50***</b>	(3.05)
Perceived Group Threat	-1.17	(3.30)			-0.29	(3.26)
Nationalism	-13.44***	(3.18)			-10.37***	(4.28)
<i>Race-neutral</i>						
Social Conservatism			-19.48***	(2.74)	-8.28***	(2.62)
Fiscal Conservatism			-39.17***	(3.19)	-30.63***	(2.99)
Justified Police Force			-7.63***	(2.71)	2.53	(3.49)
Unjustified Protest Violence			-14.50***	(1.74)	-6.50***	(1.65)
Pro-Police Affect			-9.70***	(3.38)	-6.86**	(3.12)
Moral Equalitarianism			25.30***	(2.83)	9.16***	(2.73)
<i>Sociodemographic Controls</i>						
Education	-0.59	(0.23)	0.21	(0.24)	-0.51**	(0.23)
Income (Logged)	-0.92	(0.62)	-0.23	(0.66)	-0.77	(0.60)
Men <sup>1</sup>	-6.78***	(0.96)	-5.16***	(1.01)	-5.51***	(0.94)
Church Attendance	0.38	(0.40)	2.34***	(0.40)	1.05***	(0.38)
Protestant	-0.28	(1.39)	0.34	(1.45)	0.81	(1.34)
Catholic	0.63	(1.57)	-0.39	(1.64)	0.72	(1.51)
Jewish	5.16	(4.25)	4.03	(4.43)	4.48	(4.10)
Republican <sup>3</sup>	-14.56***	(1.37)	-10.34***	(1.55)	-6.92***	(1.44)
Independent	-7.02***	(1.24)	-5.61***	(1.33)	-3.03***	(1.23)
Age	0.05*	(0.03)	0.11***	(0.30)	0.08**	(0.03)
Constant	115.53	(4.08)	73.43	(3.70)	115.01	(5.42)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.45		0.40		0.49	

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Note.—Weighted and Imputed Coefficients Presented.

<sup>1</sup>Women are the omitted category.

<sup>3</sup>Democrat is the omitted category

**Table 3. Regression Models predicting attitudes towards racial schemas (n=2,631)**

VARIABLES	COLORBLIND RACISM		OVERT RACISM		PERCEIVED GROUP THREAT		NATIONALISM	
	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>SE</i>
Men <sup>1</sup>	0.33	(1.02)	<b>1.27**</b>	(1.12)	<b>-2.28***</b>	(1.07)	<b>-1.99***</b>	(0.67)
Education	-2.81***	(0.24)	-0.59***	(0.27)	-1.32***	(0.25)	-0.99*	(0.16)
Logged Income	-1.61***	(0.66)	-1.38***	(0.73)	-2.59***	(0.70)	-0.75***	(0.44)
Church	-0.77	(0.53)	-1.40***	(0.38)	-0.93	(0.26)	1.01***	(0.27)
Protestant <sup>2</sup>	5.41***	(1.85)	3.14**	(1.35)	2.25***	(1.27)	1.35***	(0.98)
Catholic	6.75***	(1.92)	3.35**	(1.40)	4.22***	(1.32)	2.33**	(1.11)
Jewish	-5.28	(4.29)	3.77	(3.11)	-2.68	(2.93)	0.72	(3.00)
Republican <sup>3</sup>	27.71***	(1.41)	8.83***	(1.43)	10.89***	(1.34)	13.29***	(0.87)
Independent	16.52***	(1.32)	4.63***	(1.42)	7.30***	(1.34)	5.19***	(0.85)
Age	0.11***	(0.24)	0.66**	(0.27)	0.04**	(0.25)	0.23	(0.23)
Constant	93.53***	(3.77)	68.98***	(4.02)	80.77***	(3.93)	64.10***	(2.30)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.27		0.10		0.15		0.21	

\*\*\* P<0.01, \*\* P<0.05, \* P<0.1

Notes.— Weighted and Imputed Values shown.

Dependent Variables Scaled to 0-100.

<sup>1</sup>Women are the omitted category

<sup>2</sup>Non-religious is the omitted category

<sup>3</sup>Democrat is the omitted category

## DISCUSSION

Ethnoracial political mobilization generates a context of heightened visibility around racial contentions (Kriesi 2004). This makes it a unique empirical opportunity to examine White attitudes towards *direct* political claims of racial inequality. Most studies of *contemporary racism* examine White public opinion towards indirect targets primarily government sponsored race-based policies. Many studies on *White public opinion towards Black political action* were concerning the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. As such, this study addresses the lack of empirical evidence in the literature on White public opinion towards contemporary black political action and the role of racial attitudes in shaping those sociopolitical views. Such empirical accounts remain important to contribute to the broader theoretical and public debate over the significance of race and racism in shaping the sociopolitical context of the contemporary United States.

My first research question examines the extent to which racial prejudice predicts White orientations towards the Black Lives Matter movement. I find evidence that racial prejudice is the most significant predictor of White opposition towards Black Lives Matter, even when we take prominent race-neutral explanations into account. Orientation towards police is one ostensibly race-neutral explanation that is manifested in the counter-mobilization Blue Lives Matter. This counter-framework organizes their opposition towards Black Lives Matter around a concern for law enforcement. The results of this study do not negate that a concern for law enforcement shapes orientation towards the movement, but it does provide evidence that orientation towards the police is not a dominant or even strong predictor of White orientations towards the Black Lives Matter movement.

The All Lives Matter mantra is another prominent oppositional framework against Black Lives Matter. This mantra purports that a general concern for all lives fuels opposition against a movement that highlights the lives of one particular racial group. I investigate this claim by examining the association between moral equalitarianism and feelings towards Black Lives Matter in Table 2. Contrary to the All Lives Matter claim

that a commitment to equalitarianism drives opposition towards Black Lives Matter, I find that individuals reporting higher levels of commitment to equalitarianism are actually more likely to support the movement. This finding suggests that the All Lives Matter mantra may be more a manifestation of colorblind racial ideologies that delegitimize Black political grievances of racial inequality rather than a concern for equalitarianism.

Race scholars have claimed that colorblind racial schemas dominate the racial landscape of the United States in the contemporary context (Bonilla-Silva 2000; Omi and Winant 2015). Although colorblind racism is the most dominant predictor, I also find evidence against the notion of “colorblind hegemony.” Overt racism also exerts a large and independent effect on White orientations towards Black Lives Matter, which is in line with scholars that argue against the dismissal of “traditional racism” in favor of “new racism” in understanding contemporary race relations (Tesler 2016; Brown et. al 2008). Furthermore, nationalism also exerts a significant and independent effect on orientation towards Black Lives Matter. This findings encourages continued investigations on the association between national identity and racial politics in the United States.

Finally, I examine whether White subscription to various racial schemas varies by sociodemographic characteristics. In line with existing research, individuals with higher income and education were less likely to subscribe to all racial schemas whereas Non-Democrats were significantly more likely to subscribe to all racial schemas. Furthermore, I find evidence to support the notion that religion or the lack thereof is a significant shaper of White political orientations but the effect is nuanced. Non-religious individuals are significantly less likely to subscribe to racial schemas than their religious counterparts. However, high church attendance decreases reports of overt racial schemas. This is in line with existing evidence that church attendance is a strong indicator of religiosity.

I also find that White men are more likely to report overt racial schemas whereas White women are more likely to report subscription to racial schemas related to

nationhood and perceived group threat. Table 2 shows that White men in general are less likely than White women to support the Black Lives Matter movement. This has potential implications for how racism is conceptualized in the public imaginary. For example, overt denunciations of Black Lives Matter are likely to garner more public attention. My results show that these overt racial expressions are more likely to be spearheaded by men meaning that the “face” of racism can easily become a man’s face. However, the fact that White women are less likely to subscribe to overt racial schemas but more likely to subscribe to racial schemas concerning perceived group threat and nationhood suggest that there may be gendered variations in the ways that racial attitudes are expressed. Future research should continue to examine gendered differences in expressions of racial feelings.

It can be argued that race infuses all of the variables that were tested in the model and thus it is impossible to divide the camps into “race-neutral” and “race-centric.” I agree with other scholars that conservatism, orientation towards the police, orientation towards protest are all likely shaped by racial meanings and histories (Federico & Sidanius, 2002; Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996). Correlation analysis also confirm that there are significant correlations between the different models tested in both the “race-neutral” camp and the “race-centric” camp. Yet, the analysis also suggests that the frameworks are sufficiently distinct to warrant separate constructs. These high correlations suggest, however, that the effects of racial attitudes on shaping orientation towards Black Lives Matter may be underestimated.

What this study contributes is an empirical account of modern White attitudes towards Black political action on a nationally representative sample of White-Americans. It shows a prevailing association between racial attitudes and White orientations towards Black political action in the contemporary context, even when we take prominent ostensibly race-neutral explanations for opposition into account.



## **CONCLUSION**

White opposition towards Black political claims of racial inequality is based in a racial structure and yet examining the factors that shape opposition towards the contemporary black movement reflects the evolving nature of white opposition. I find evidence against the notion of the declining significance of race and racism in shaping contemporary political attitudes among Whites. Furthermore, we must interrogate this theoretical narrative that we have moved from overt racism to new racisms characterized by colorblind racial schemas. My findings show that beyond colorblind racism, overt racism and nationalism are also shaping race relations in the contemporary context. Together these findings are not only an empirical account of White opposition towards the Black Lives Matter movement but also a window into contemporary race relations in the United States.

## Appendix

**Table 4. Measure Construction Chart**

**Fiscal Conservatism** measure is a composite variable consisting of the following survey items on limited government, business, tax, and welfare.

- 1) *Limited Government*: Which of the two statements comes closer to your view? – 1. The main reason government has become bigger over the years is because it has gotten involved in things that people should do for themselves. 2. Government has become bigger because the problems we face have become bigger.
- 2) *Business*: How much government regulation of business is good for society? – 1. A Great Deal 2. A Lot 3. Moderate Amount 4. a Little 5. None at All.
- 3) *Tax*: Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose increasing income taxes on people making over one million dollars per year? – 1. Favor 2. Oppose, 3. Neither Favor or Oppose.
- 4) *Welfare*: Should federal spending on welfare programs be increased, decreased or kept the same? – 1. Increased 2. Decreased 3. Kept the Same.

*-Together these values loaded onto a single factor with an Eigenvalue of 1.1. The Cronbach's Alpha score was 0.70. The measure was coded and rescaled to a 0-1 measure so that higher values signify higher levels of fiscal conservatism.*

**Social Conservatism** measure is a composite variable consisting of four survey items on marriage, traditional values, abortion, and religiosity.

- 1) *Gay and Lesbian Marriage*: “Which comes closest to your view?” – 1. Gay and Lesbian couples should be allowed to legally marry 2. Gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to form civil unions but not legally marry, 3. There should be no legal recognition of a gay or lesbian couple's relationship.
- 2) *Traditional Family Values*: “This country would have many fewer problems if there were more emphasis on traditional family ties.” – 1. Agree strongly 2. Agree somewhat 3. Neither agree nor disagree 4. Disagree somewhat 5. Disagree strongly.
- 3) *Abortion*: “Which one of the opinions on this page best agrees with your view?” – 1. By law, abortion should never be permitted 2. By law, only in case of rape, incest, or woman's life in danger 3. By law, for reasons other than rape, incest, or woman's life in danger is need established 4. By law, abortion as a matter of personal choice, 5. Other Specify, Don't Know, and Refused.
- 4) *Religiosity*: Do you consider religion to be an important part of your life, or not? – 1. Important 2. Important 3. Don't know 4. Refused.

*-Together these values loaded onto a single factor with an Eigenvalue of 1.83. The Cronbach's Alpha score was 0.74. The measure was coded and rescaled to a 0-1 measure so that higher values signify higher levels of social conservatism.*

**Table 4, cont.**

<p><b>Orientation towards protest</b> consists of two measures using two questions on protest.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <i>Police Violence Justified</i>: The first question assessed respondents perception of how justified the police are in roughing up protesters. The scale ran from 5 meaning a great deal, 4 meaning a lot, 3 meaning a modest amount, 2 meaning a little, and 1 meaning not at all.</li> <li>2) <i>Protesters Violence Unjustified</i>: The second question assessed respondent perceptions of how justified protesters are in the use of violence. The scale ran from 5 meaning a great deal, 4 meaning a lot, 3 meaning a modest amount, 2 meaning a little, and 1 meaning not at all.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Moral equalitarianism</b> consists of four variables. All questions were measured on a 5 point Likert scale with options: Agree strongly, Agree somewhat, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree somewhat, Disagree strongly.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. This country would be better off if we worried less about how equal people are</li> <li>2. It is not really that big a problem if some people have more of a chance in life than others.</li> <li>3. If people were treated more equally in this country we would have many fewer problems.'</li> </ol> <p><i>-Together these values loaded onto a single factor with an Eigenvalue of 1.58. The Cronbach's Alpha score was 0.70. The measure was coded and rescaled to a 0-1 measure so that higher values signify higher levels of subscription to moral equalitarianism.</i></p>
<p><b>Orientation towards Police</b> was measured using feeling thermometer ranging from 0-100 of feelings towards the police with higher numbers meaning more positive feelings towards the police.</p> <p><i>-The measure was coded and rescaled to a 0-1 measure so that higher values signify higher positive feelings towards law enforcement.</i></p>
<p><b>Colorblind racism</b> measure is a composite variable consisting of four standard survey items used to measure new racisms that blend anti-Black affect and individualism. All questions were measured on a 5 point Likert scale with options: Agree strongly, Agree somewhat, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree somewhat, Disagree strongly.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Blacks should work up without special favors</li> <li>2) Past slavery makes life more difficult for Blacks</li> <li>3) Blacks have gotten less than they deserve.</li> <li>4) Blacks must try harder to get ahead.</li> </ol> <p><i>-Together these values loaded onto a single factor with an Eigenvalue of 3.87. The Cronbach Alpha score was 0.74. The measure was coded and rescaled to a 0-1 measure so that higher values signify higher levels of subscription to colorblind racial logics.</i></p>

**Table 4, cont.**

**Overt racism** measure is a composite variable consisting of three survey items measuring traditional expressions of overt racism.

- 1) Feeling thermometer ranging from 1-100 on feelings towards Blacks
  - 2) Question assessing stereotypical association between Blacks and violence. Respondents were asked to rate Blacks on a scale from peaceful to violent with 7 meaning violent and 1 meaning peaceful
  - 3) Question assessing stereotypical association between Blacks and work ethic using a variable that measures how hardworking respondents think Blacks are on a scale from lazy to hardworking 7 meaning lazy and 1 meaning hardworking.
- Together these values loaded onto a single factor with an Eigenvalue of 1.61. The Cronbach's Alpha score was 0.72. The measure was coded and rescaled to a 0-1 measure so that higher values signify higher levels of subscription to overt racial logics.*

**Perceived discrimination** is measured using the following question.

- 1) *Perception of economic threat* : "How likely is it that many Whites are unable to find a job because employers are hiring minorities instead? 1. Extremely likely. 2. Very likely. 3. Moderately likely. 4. Slightly likely. 5. Not at all likely.
  - 2) *Perception of unfair laws against Whites*: How important is it that Whites work together to change laws that are unfair to Whites? 1. Extremely important 2. Very important. 3. Moderately important. 4. A little important 5. Not at all important.
  - 3) *Perception of discrimination against Whites*. "How much discrimination is there in the United States today against Whites? 1. A great deal. 2. A lot. 3. A moderate amount. 4. A little. 5. None at all.
- Together these values loaded onto a single factor with an Eigenvalue of 1.24. Cronbach's Alpha score was 0.62. The measure was coded and rescaled to a 0-1 measure so that higher values signify higher levels of subscription to perceived group threat racial logics.*

**Nation-Based Logic** is a composite variable consisting of three survey items derived from factor analysis.

- 1) *Feelings towards Flag*: When you see the American flag flying does it make you feel good, bad, or neither good nor bad? 1. Good. 2. Bad. 3. Neither good nor bad.
  - 2) *American Identity*: How important is being White to one's identity? 1. Extremely important 2. Very important. 3. Moderately important. 4. A little important 5. Not at all important.
  - 4) *American Superiority*: 'The world would be a better place if people from other countries were more like Americans.' 1. Agree strongly 2. Agree somewhat 3. Neither agree nor disagree 4. Disagree somewhat 5. Disagree strongly.
- Together these values loaded onto a single factor with an Eigenvalue of 1.77. The Cronbach's Alpha score was 0.70. The measure was coded and rescaled to a 0-1 measure so that higher values signify higher levels of subscription to nation-based racial logics.*

**Table 4, cont.**

**Sociodemographic Variables:**

**Education** is a continuous measure from 1 year of education to 16 years of education

**Gender** is a dichotomous variable. Women are the omitted category.

**Income** is a continuous measure of income, logged due to a positive skew

**Church attendance** is measured using the question “Do you go to religious services [every week, almost every week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, or never/ never, a few times a year, once or twice a month, almost every week, or every week]?”

**Political party options** is limited to Democrats, Republicans, and Independents.

**Religion** is limited to non-religious, protestant, catholic, Jewish, other religion. Non-religious are the omitted category.

**Age** is a continuous variable from 18-90 years old

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